DPLS 723 Qualitative Research Theory & Design

Summer 2011 3 Credits

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Class Dates: June 20, June 27, July 1 (Fri), July 4, July 11, July 18 (field work & podcasts, July 29 (Fri)

Please note: We will not meet as a class on July 18th. You will be conducting field work and responding to podcasts from the Qualitative Research Summer Institute 2010. [http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/siqr/downloads.php](http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/siqr/downloads.php)

Pre class assignment - See readings below plus the following:
In preparation for our first class session please bring the following to class:

- 2 objects that communicate something about your professional identity
- 2 objects that communicate something about your personal identity.

Please bring the objects to class and keep them concealed until you are asked to present them for an in-class exercise.

Course Description

While qualitative research has become more accepted and popular as a method for studying a variety of social science issues, limited opportunities exist to design and complete qualitative studies with the professional guidance necessary for novice qualitative researchers. As a result, many studies have been completed without the rigorous attention necessary to produce studies worthy of publication in the competitive journals available. It is the purpose of this course to provide an understanding of the theoretical perspectives underlying qualitative research in the social sciences, and to provide an opportunity for students to participate in qualitative research exercises with the guidance of the professor throughout the quarter. The course is thus designed to provide opportunities for developing specific qualitative research skills while gaining familiarity with theories, issues, and problems in qualitative research. The course examines the relationships between the theories and the purpose of qualitative inquiry.

Specific objectives include:
Having completed assigned readings, participating in class discussions, and engaging in field work, each student will demonstrate knowledge of, or competency in the following:

- Terms and definitions associated with qualitative research.
- Historical development of qualitative research.
- The various theoretical and philosophical perspectives underlying qualitative research.
- Formulation of research questions, the selection of appropriate researcher roles, and the description of participants and setting/context investigated.
- Practice of a variety of data collection strategies used in qualitative research.
• Different techniques used to analyze data collected during qualitative studies.
• The interpretation and application of findings from qualitative studies.

Required Texts

Additional Readings as posted on Blackboard

Recommended Texts
A bibliography of qualitative texts will be developed throughout the course with input from both the instructor and students.

Assignments and Grading
Class Participation 10%
Reflexive Journal 10%
Mid-term 20%
Research Exercises 20%
Final Project 30%

Class Participation
Attend and participate actively in class discussions. Students must inform the instructor in advance if they are unable to attend a class session. In accordance with departmental policy, students must repeat the course if they miss more than 2 class sessions.

Reflexive Journal (4)
Choose one topic from the required readings. Write a one-page critical reflection related to this topic. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Why is this issue of importance to social scientists engaging in qualitative research or those reading qualitative research? What are the questions and/or concerns that this topic raises for you. Journal will be posted on blackboard and will not exceed 500 words. Four entries due as indicated on course schedule.

Research Exercises
Research exercises will be completed as assigned and posted on Blackboard. These assignments will provide students with an opportunity to practice qualitative research methods. For each assignment, students will include a write-up that will include the following:
• brief description of context and focus
• main learnings in terms of method
• brief overview of what you learned about your focus
• personal learnings from this in terms of yourself as researcher
**Mid-Term Assignment**

Based on our reading and discussions of paradigms available to qualitative researchers, choose an article from one of the following journals that focuses on a discussion of methodology: *Qualitative Inquiry, International Review of Qualitative Research, Qualitative Research, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (an example will be provided in class). Include the full bibliographic citation and the author's abstract on your first page. Discuss the author's paradigmatic assumptions and the implications for the following: epistemology (or how data is being defined and/or how meaning is being made), research design, subjectivity, and implications/learnings for yourself as a researcher. Assignment will be e-mailed to the instructor as an attachment and will not exceed 5 pages (excluding citation and abstract page).

**Final Project**

This course project will entail an exploratory study of a topic or setting in which learnings from the course are practiced and experienced. Projects may involve participant observation, interviewing, analysis of material culture, literature reviews, and/or combinations of the above. The project is intended to give students the experience of conducting inquiry in naturalistic settings, and its relevance for understanding social phenomena in a cultural context.

The final write-up will include but not be limited to the following:

- brief discussion of rationale and background
- a description of the methods and procedures used to gather data for this research project,
- a discussion of subjectivity and ethics
- **brief** analysis of data collected (what you learned about your focus)
- personal learnings from this in terms of yourself as researcher

Late work will not be accepted unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor.

Point/Grade correspondence for Grades:

- 95-100% = A
- 90-94.99% = A-
- 85-90% = B
- 80-84.99% = B-

**Course Schedule**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topic/Assignments</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/20</td>
<td>Course Overview&lt;br&gt;In-class Exercise&lt;br&gt;Why Qualitative Inquiry</td>
<td>Crotty, Ch. 1&lt;br&gt;Esterberg, Ch. 1&lt;br&gt;Somekh &amp; Lewin, Part I</td>
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<td>6/27</td>
<td>The Significance of Theory&lt;br&gt;Research Traditions-Positivism, Constructionism, &amp; Phenomenology&lt;br&gt;Framing the Questions-Getting Started&lt;br&gt;<em>Journal Entry #1</em></td>
<td>Esterberg, Ch. 2-3&lt;br&gt;Crotty, Ch. 2-5&lt;br&gt;Seidman, Ch. 3</td>
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<td>7/1</td>
<td>Critical Traditions &amp; Postmodernism&lt;br&gt;<em>Journal Entry #2</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>Proposal (Research Exercise 1)</em></td>
<td>Somekh &amp; Lewin Part III, VIII&lt;br&gt;Crotty 6-9</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
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| 7/4   | What Method do I choose?  
*Journal Entry #3*  
*Observation (Research Exercise 2)* | Esterberg, Ch. 4-7  
Somekh & Lewin, Part IV  
+ chapter 18  
Seidman, Ch. 1, 7 |
| 7/11  | What to do with Data?  
*Interview (Research Exercise 3: interview guide and discussion of learnings)*  
*Mid-Term Assignment Due* | Esterberg, Ch. 8-9  
Seidman 8  
St. Pierre (on Blackboard) |
| 7/18  | Field Work & Analysis (Research Exercise 4)  
*Journal Entry #4* | TBD |
| 7/29  | Subjectivity, Ethics, and Reflexivity  
*Journal Entry #4*  
*Final Project Due* | Esterberg, Ch. 3, 10  
Seidman 5, 8  
Additional Readings on Blackboard |

Note: Additional readings may be posted on Blackboard as deemed relevant and helpful.

**Final Exam Project**

1. **Conduct a "mini" research project** on a topic of your choice. You must present evidence of at least two data sources, for example:
   - Observation notes,
   - Interview transcripts, (you may submit two interviews for your two data sources)
   - Documents,
   - Etc.

2. **Identify learnings from your data** - Gain an intimacy with your data such that you can identify major learnings or themes as they are emerging from your analysis.

3. **Present a brief write-up** of your findings. This write-up should include a statement of your research question, a brief description of your research methods, and the findings or questions made apparent through the doing of the research.

4. **Reflections on the process**
   - What paradigm do you consider to most influence your research?
   - How does knowledge of this paradigm effect the "doing" of your research?
   - What was the process you chose for analyzing the data and how was the process influenced by this paradigm (if appropriate)?
   - Did this paradigm effect how you chose to present your findings? If so, then explain.

Paper should not exceed 5-6 pages for parts three and four combined. Please submit all materials electronically prior to our last class session on Friday June 29th.
Grading Criteria for Written Work (Adapted from the DPLS Academic Papers Rubric)

Content Criteria:
The content of papers should reflect the level and style of content in readings and discussions. There is an expectation that doctoral students will reach outside of their comfort zone in terms of appropriation of ideas, concepts, and frameworks. The substance of papers and other writings will be weighed against the general level of discourse in class meetings and the style and density of expression of the readings.

Thought and Expression Criteria
Student writing should raise vital questions or issues, formulating them clearly and precisely. I will be looking for evidence of breadth and depth and the insightful, in-depth analysis of complex ideas. Main points should be developed and supported with relevant information and references that are appropriately incorporated.

The organization and logic of your writing is critical. The expectation is for well focused, well organized, and well reasoned conclusions. The writing should flow with the reader not getting lost or having to work to determine what you are saying.

There is also an expectation that your writing/thinking has an open and inclusive character when exploring alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as appropriate, their assumptions, implications, and/or practical consequences.

Technical Criteria
Your writing should be clear and demonstrate a high level of vocabulary through careful word choice. Sentences should be constructed skillfully and purposefully. Transitions between paragraphs and sections are important and will be evaluated for their efficacy in weaving your concepts, themes, and purposes together. Summaries and conclusions are also vital elements of good writing and will be evaluated based on their appropriateness and effectiveness.

Grammar, punctuation, and spelling are expected to be flawless. Careful proof reading of your paper is a basic expectation.

Papers, unless otherwise noted are to be completed in APA style. References should be cited properly within the text and a complete reference list must be provided. Appropriate use of headings will also be noted. Refer to the template for academic course papers for further guidance.